

Approved Standards for Scientific Testimony and Report Language for the Friction Ridge Discipline

Table of Contents

1	PURPOSE	2
2	SCOPE	2
3	GENERAL INFORMATION	2
4	STATEMENTS APPROVED FOR FBI FRICTION RIDGE DISCIPLINE EXAMINATION TESTIMONY AND/OR COMMUNICATIONS OF RESULTS	2
4.1	Identification	2
4.2	Exclusion	3
4.3	Inconclusive	3
5	STATEMENTS NOT APPROVED FOR FBI FRICTION RIDGE DISCIPLINE EXAMINATION TESTIMONY AND/OR COMMUNICATIONS OF RESULTS	3
5.1	Uniqueness and Exclusion of All Other Sources	3
5.2	Zero Error Rate	4
5.3	Statistics or Probability	4
5.4	Measure of Accuracy	4
5.5	Scientific Certainty	4
6	REVISION HISTORY	5

Approved Standards for Scientific Testimony and Report Language for the Friction Ridge Discipline

1 PURPOSE

- A. This document provides examples of the statements approved for reporting examination results and providing expert conclusions and opinions during testimony by personnel within the FBI Laboratory Friction Ridge Discipline.
- B. It is noted that these examples are not intended to be all-inclusive and may be dependent upon the precedent set by the judge or locality in which testimony is provided.
- C. These examples are not intended to serve as precedent for other forensic laboratories and do not imply that statements by other forensic laboratories or those made in previous FBI Friction Ridge Discipline reports or testimony are incorrect, indefensible, or erroneous.

2 SCOPE

This document applies to Friction Ridge Discipline personnel who communicate results and/or provide testimony.

3 GENERAL INFORMATION

- A. The examiner will ensure that all communications of Friction Ridge Discipline results are consistent with the statements contained within this document.
- B. The examiner will ensure that their testimony related to Friction Ridge Discipline examinations is consistent with the statements contained within this document.
- C. An Administrative Reviewer will ensure that Friction Ridge Discipline communications of results that undergo administrative review are consistent with the statements contained within this document.
- D. To ensure compliance with the statements contained within this document, all Friction Ridge Discipline testimony will be reviewed in accordance with the FBI Laboratory Quality Assurance Manual ([LAB-100](#)).

4 STATEMENTS APPROVED FOR FBI FRICTION RIDGE DISCIPLINE EXAMINATION TESTIMONY AND/OR COMMUNICATIONS OF RESULTS

4.1 Identification

- A. Identification is an examiner's conclusion that two friction ridge prints originated from the same source.
- B. The conclusion is an examiner's opinion that the observed friction ridge skin features are in sufficient correspondence such that the examiner would not expect to see the same arrangement of features repeated in a print that came from a different source and has found insufficient friction ridge skin features in disagreement to conclude that the prints came from different sources.

- C. The basis for an identification conclusion is an examiner’s opinion that the observed corresponding friction ridge skin features provide extremely strong support for the proposition that the two prints came from the same source and extremely weak support for the proposition that the two prints came from different sources.
- D. An identification is the statement of an examiner’s opinion (an inductive inference¹) that the probability that the two prints were made by different sources is so small that it is negligible.
- E. The terms identification and source identification are interchangeable.

4.2 Exclusion

- A. Exclusion is an examiner’s conclusion that two friction ridge prints did not originate from the same source.
- B. The basis for an exclusion conclusion is an examiner’s opinion that the observed friction ridge skin features are in sufficient disagreement and provide extremely strong support for the proposition that the two prints came from different sources and extremely weak or no support for the proposition that the two prints came from the same source.
- C. The terms exclusion and source exclusion are interchangeable.

4.3 Inconclusive

- A. Inconclusive is an examiner’s conclusion that there is insufficient quantity and/or clarity of corresponding friction ridge skin features between two prints such that the examiner is unable to identify or exclude the two prints as originating from the same source.
- B. The basis for an inconclusive conclusion is an examiner’s opinion that an identification or exclusion cannot be made due to insufficient information in either of the two prints examined.

5 STATEMENTS NOT APPROVED FOR FBI FRICTION RIDGE DISCIPLINE EXAMINATION TESTIMONY AND/OR COMMUNICATIONS OF RESULTS

5.1 Uniqueness and Exclusion of All Other Sources

- A. A conclusion provided during testimony or in a report is ultimately an examiner’s decision and is not based on a statistically-derived or verified measurement or comparison to all other friction ridge skin impression features.
- B. Therefore, an examiner shall not assert that an identification or exclusion conclusion is based on the uniqueness² of an item of evidence.

¹ “By the process of induction or inference, predictions about new situations are inferred or induced from the existing body of knowledge. In other words, an inference is a generalization, but one that is made in a logical and scientifically defensible manner.” Oxford Dictionary of Forensic Science 130 (2012).

² As used in this document, the term ‘uniqueness’ means having the quality of being the only one of its kind. OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY 804 (Oxford Univ. Press 2012).

- C. In addition, an examiner shall not assert that two friction ridge prints originated from the same source to the exclusion of all other sources or use the terms “individualize” or “individualization” when describing a conclusion.

5.2 Zero Error Rate

An examiner shall not assert that friction ridge print examination is infallible or has a zero error rate.

5.3 Statistics or Probability

An examiner shall not provide a conclusion that includes a statistic or numerical degree of probability except when based on relevant and appropriate data.

5.4 Measure of Accuracy

- A. An examiner shall not cite the number of friction ridge print examinations performed in their career as a direct measure for the accuracy of a conclusion provided.
- B. An examiner may cite the number of friction ridge print examinations performed in their career for the purpose of establishing, defending, or describing the examiner’s qualifications or experience.

5.5 Scientific Certainty

An examiner shall not assert that two friction ridge prints originated from the same source with absolute or 100% certainty; or use the expressions “reasonable degree of scientific certainty,” “reasonable scientific certainty,” or similar assertions of reasonable certainty in either reports or testimony unless required to do so by a judge or applicable law.³

³ See *Memorandum from the Attorney General to Heads of Department components* (Sept. 9, 2016), <http://www.justice.gov/opa/file/891366/download>.

6 REVISION HISTORY

Revision	Issue Date	Changes
05	7/15/2021	Updated to correspond with current Department of Justice issued document. Section 4.3, remove last sentence of section.
06	02/22/2022	Updated Format and Document references Section 1 A and Section 2 – clarified individuals.